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ABSTRACT

The effect of social studies instruction on students' attitudes toward school and society for two years is analyzed. The social studies variables examined for their influence on the trends across time for nine attitudes were the number of social studies semesters, the extent of controversial issues treatment, treatment of more than one side of controversial issues by teachers, teacher's partisanship-neutrality during issues discussion, and student feelings of freedom to express opinions while discussing controversial issues. Data were collected during the spring semesters 1974-76 from a convenience sample of 200 randomly selected students within each of ten schools. Sixty-four attitude items were used to generate factor scores for the following nine attitude dimensions: (1) trust in people; (2) social integration; (3) political confidence; (4) political interest; (5) trust in other students; (6) trust in school adults; (7) integration in school culture; (8) school political confidence; and (9) school political interest. Findings indicated that the nine attitudes were very stable over the three data collection points for the two-year period and that the best predictor was the students' feeling of freedom to express opinions in class discussion. It is concluded that the social studies classroom climate is more important to student attitudes than any other factor. Tables representing multivariate analysis of variance for trends over the two years are included. (Author/DB)

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Social Studies and Secondary Students' Political Attitudes Toward Society and School: A Two-Year Longitudinal Study

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Overview

This study analyzed changes in student political attitudes toward school and society over the two-year period from March, 1974 to April, 1976. Factors examined here as contributing to attitude change over this period are limited to those having to do with social studies instruction: number of social studies semesters, the extent of controversial issues treatment, the extent to which teachers treated more than one side of controversial issues, the extent to which students felt free to express their own opinions while discussing controversial issues. The attitudes measured were:

General Social Attitudes	School Attitudes
Trust in People	Trust in Other Students
Social Integration	Trust in School Adults
Political Confidence	Integration in School Culture
Political Interest	School Political Confidence
	School Political Interest

Procedures

Data for the study were collected during the Spring of 1974, and again in 1975 and 1976 from the same schools and students. Thirteen schools were selected and participated in the first year of the study. However, three schools declined to participate for the second year's data collection. Two urban schools are of medium size (1000-2000) and have racially integrated student populations. Four schools are suburban, large (2000 or over) and have predominantly (95%) white students. One urban school is large and has predominantly black students. One is small, suburban, and has predominantly white students, and two are small, rural and have predominantly white students. The schools were selected to arrive at a range of size, proximity to urban areas, and social composition. They comprise a convenience sample.

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Approximately 200 students within each school were randomly sampled either through student name lists for each grade, or through required classes at each grade level. Questionnaires were administered either to the entire 200 in an auditorium or in individual classrooms. The sample mortality for students

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from 1974 to 1975 was 39%, despite efforts to avoid that problem. From 1974 to 1976 the mortality was 68%. School dropouts, residential mobility, school absence and refusal to respond to the 1975 and 1976 questionnaires appear to be major factors explaining this mortality. The distribution of these factors among students across the ten schools is not known, but dropouts and mobility from the school districts appeared to account for about 31% of the mortality. Absences and early graduation appear to account for another 15%. The final number for which complete data over three questionnaire administrations was available was 339 out of the 1,061 total students in 1974 who could possibly have responded in 1976. Only these 339 students in nine schools were used in the present analysis.

Sixty-four attitude items were used to generate factor scores for the nine attitude dimensions. Comparisons of the factor structures across the three data collection occasions showed a very high congruence--the structure of the attitudes is very stable across time. Cronbach alphas for the nine scales for the three occasions range from .60 to .88, with only two below .70.

Summary of Findings

The nine student attitudes are very stable over the three data collection points for the two-year period. Correlations for one year to the next are high and consistent, and the two-year correlations are slightly lower in most cases. For example, for political confidence, or efficacy, the correlations are:

1974-1975	.61
1975-1976	.70
1974-1976	.59

As mentioned above, five social studies variables are examined for their influence on the trends across time for the nine attitudes. To do this, multivariate analysis of variance was used. This analysis breaks the trend down into two independent components: a linear component, and a quadratic, or curvelinear component. First, the analysis determines whether there are significant linear and curvelinear attitude trends. Then each of the five social studies variables is examined separately for a possible interaction with the linear and curvelinear trends. Take the following data from the first table: (cell entries are mean Z-scores)

Predictor: Freedom to Express Opinion in Class Discussion of Controversial Issues

Attitude: Political Interest

	1974	1975	1976
Feel Free at all times:	.149	.181	.256
Feel Hesitant:	-.073	-.240	-.190

For these data, there is a significant interaction between the linear trend and the classroom variable, such that when students report feeling free to

express opinions the linear trend of the means is upward across time, and when they feel less than fully free to express opinions the linear trend of the means is downward. There is clearly no linear trend without the predictor, however, because without the predictor in the analysis the overall means for the three years are virtually identical.

Another example should suffice:

Predictor: Extent to Which Controversial Social Issues are Treated in the Classroom

Attitude: Political Confidence (Efficacy)

	Year		
	1974	1975	1976
Often or Very Often:	.004	-.062	-.189
Occasionally or Never:	.009	.010	.031

For this example there is a significant linear trend without considering the predictor--the trend is clearly downward over the two year period. There is also a significant interaction, or joint effect, of the predictor with the linear trend--the students having frequent controversial issues exposure are declining in political confidence over the two years, while those not so exposed are remaining stable in this attitude.

Tables 1 to 5 give the entire set of means and trends for each predictor across all nine attitudes. While the analysis of this group of 45 different sets is tedious, there are interesting results. They can be only briefly summarized here.

First, let us examine the general social attitudes. Political interest changes little over the two year period, although it drops slightly in 1975, an off-election year. The only social studies variable seeming to influence it is freedom of opinion expression, as noted above in the examples. General trust in others increases dramatically, especially from 1975 to 1976, resulting in significant linear and quadratic trends. This may be a reflection of the dissipation of Watergate influence, although that is quite speculative, of course. Although not quite significant at the .05 level, the teacher's presenting more than one side appears to be related to the linear trend. While general trust goes up, political confidence--the belief in one's ability to influence governmental decision-making--goes down with a significant linear trend. Further, and surprisingly, three social studies variables are related to this downward trend, and two of the three in a negative pattern. The more controversial issues exposure and the more free students feel to express themselves, the more sharply their political confidence drops. Finally, social integration--feeling of belongingness to the society--increases with a significant linear trend. No social studies variable is related to this increase.

Turning to the school attitudes, we find no change at all in school political interest, and no social studies classroom factor interacting with the attitude trend. School political confidence has an interesting and significant curvelinear trend and is also influenced positively by all of the social studies

variables except number of social studies semesters. This is in interesting contrast to the contrary interactions of the school variables with general political confidence. Apparently social studies affects positively one's confidence to influence the immediate environment but negatively confidence to influence more remote events. This is a curious and interesting finding.

Feelings of integration in the school culture underwent little overall change, but both the extent of controversial issues exposure and freedom to express opinions contributed to positive trends in this attitude. The two school trust attitudes, trust in other students and trust in school adults, both had significant curvelinear trends independent of predictors. When the predictors are examined for interactions, four of the five interact in a positive way with trust in other students, as can be seen in the tables. Also, trust in school adults is influenced positively both by number of social studies semesters (the only instance of this predictor entering into a significant interaction with a trend) and the teacher discussing more than one side of an issue.

Looking at the tables in another way, which predictors appear most powerful? Clearly, the simple number of semesters spent in social studies classes and whether the teacher is partisan or neutral in discussions of social issues account for almost no attitude change at all. The best predictor appears to be the extent to which students feel free to express their own opinions while discussing controversial issues. The frequency of controversial issues treatment is also important as a predictor. But when the issues are being discussed, it is the classroom climate that is important--freedom of student expression--not so much whether he presents more than one side to an issue (although that is important for the general and school trust attitudes).

More analysis may uncover other more powerful predictors of the attitude trends. But these uncovered so far are interesting and challenging. Social studies classroom climate is again demonstrated to be more important than number of social studies courses. It is the quality, not the quantity, that counts!

Table 1: Multivariate Analysis of Variance For Trends for 1974, 1975 and 1976 Data Points. (Cell Entries are Mean Z-scores)
Predictor: Number of social studies semesters

Number of social studies semesters:	General Attitudes Year 1974	1975	1976		School Attitudes Year 1974	1975	1976	
					Trust in Other Students:			
0 to 4					.151	.020	.140	#
5 to 9					-.009	-.084	.012	
	Trust in People:				Trust in School Adults:			
0 to 4	.087	.143	.344	*,#	.205	.083	.190	#
5 to 9	-.003	.025	.163		-.070	-.037	.111	**
	Social Integration:				Integration in School Culture:			
0 to 4	.064	.085	.151	*	.131	.048	.157	
5 to 9	.071	.072	.209		.075	.038	.042	
	Political Confidence:				School Political Confidence:			
0 to 4	.078	-.023	-.068	*	.054	-.048	.045	#
5 to 9	-.091	-.054	-.182		.036	-.069	.052	
	Political Interest:				School Political Interest:			
0 to 4	-.032	-.129	-.089		.064	.085	.079	
5 to 9	.061	-.018	.101		.070	.096	.095	

* = Significant Linear Trend Across Three Data Points Without Predictor
** = Significant Interaction of Predictor with Linear Trend Across Three Data Points
\# = Significant Quadratic (Curvelinear) Trend Without Predictor
= Significant Interaction of Predictor with Quadratic (Curvelinear) Trend

Table 2: Multivariate Analysis of Variance For Trends for 1974, 1975 and 1976 Data Points. (Cell Entries are Mean Z-scores)
Predictor: Frequency of controversial issues treatment in classes

Frequency:	General Attitudes Year 1974	1975	1976		School Attitudes Year 1974	1975	1976	
					Trust in Other Students:			
Very often/often					.096	-.004	.155	#
Occasionally/Never					.060	-.068	-.082	**
	Trust in People:				Trust in School Adults:			
Very often/often	.058	.085	.280	*	.121	.050	.246	(*),#
Occasionally/Never	.047	.131	.216		.010	.001	-.046	
	Social Integration:				Integration in School Culture:			
Very often/often	.115	.144	.251	*	.128	.034	.188	**,##
Occasionally/Never	.005	-.031	.046		.077	.066	-.074	
	Political Confidence:				School Political Confidence:			
Very often/often	.004	-.062	-.189	*	.053	-.041	.133	#
Occasionally/Never	.009	.010	.031	**	.002	-.096	-.141	**,##
	Political Interest:				School Political Interest:			
Very often/often	.117	.003	.091		.114	.140	.147	
Occasionally/Never	-.172	-.214	-.176		-.015	.021	-.037	

* = Significant Linear Trend Across Three Data Points Without Predictor
** = Significant Interaction of Predictor with Linear Trend Across Three Data Points
\# = Significant Quadratic (Curvelinear) Trend Without Predictor
= Significant Interaction of Predictor with Quadratic (Curvelinear) Trend

Table 3: Multivariate Analysis of Variance For Trends for 1974, 1975 and 1976 Data Points. (Cell Entries are Mean Z-scores)
Predictor: Teachers present more than one side in discussing issues

Presents all sides:	General Attitudes Year 1974	1975	1976		School Attitudes Year 1974	1975	1976	
					Trust in Other Students:			
Almost always					.128	.077	.216	#
Sometimes/never					.013	-.174	-.111	**
	Trust in People:				Trust in School Adults:			
Almost always	.106	.182	.381	*,#	.136	.105	.288	#
Sometimes/never	-.036	-.041	.089	(**)	.018	-.059	-.026	**
	Social Integration:				Integration in School Culture:			
Almost always	.134	.160	.303	*	.175	.124	.221	
Sometimes/never	-.005	-.015	.017		.001	-.077	-.069	
	Political Confidence:				School Political Confidence:			
Almost always	.000	-.082	-.182	*	.075	.015	.142	#
Sometimes/never	.024	.004	-.032		-.016	-.144	-.089	
	Political Interest:				School Political Interest:			
Almost always	.145	.058	.134		.163	.188	.258	
Sometimes/never	-.120	-.200	-.158		-.033	.005	-.125	

* = Significant Linear Trend Across Three Data Points Without Predictor
** = Significant Interaction of Predictor with Linear Trend Across Three Data Points
\# = Significant Quadratic (Curvelinear) Trend Without Predictor
= Significant Interaction of Predictor with Quadratic (Curvelinear) Trend

Table 4: Multivariate Analysis of Variance For Trends for 1974, 1975 and 1976 Data Points. (Cell Entries are Mean Z-scores)
Predictor: Teacher's partisanship/neutrality during issues discussions

Teacher is:	General Attitudes Year 1974	1975	1976		School Attitudes Year 1974	1975	1976	
					Trust in Other Students:			
Neutral					.096	-.009	.093	#
Partisan					.039	-.096	.020	
	Trust in People:				Trust in School Adults:			
Neutral	.066	.113	.255	*,#	.156	.113	.213	#
Partisan	-.010	-.017	.300		-.044	-.148	.018	
	Social Integration:				Integration in School Culture:			
Neutral	.122	.131	.220	*	.139	.100	.121	
Partisan	-.031	-.021	.114		.034	-.102	.023	
	Political Confidence:				School Political Confidence:			
Neutral	.004	-.039	-.073	*	.039	-.045	.023	#
Partisan	.041	-.043	-.233	**	.034	-.062	.098	
	Political Interest:				School Political Interest:			
Neutral	.059	-.045	.035		.079	.132	.131	
Partisan	-.074	-.125	-.079		.067	.030	-.017	

* = Significant Linear Trend Across Three Data Points Without Predictor
** = Significant Interaction of Predictor with Linear Trend Across Three Data Points
\# = Significant Quadratic (Curvelinear) Trend Without Predictor
= Significant Interaction of Predictor with Quadratic (Curvelinear) Trend

Table 5: Multivariate Analysis of Variance For Trends for 1974, 1975 and 1976 Data Points. (Cell Entries are Mean Z-scores)
Predictor: Students' freedom to express opinion during issues discussions

Discussion Climate:	General Attitudes Year 1974	1975	1976	School Attitudes Year 1974	1975	1976
				Trust in Other Students:		
Nearly always free				.115	.089	.200 #
Hesitant				.058	-.124	-.018 **
	Trust in People:			Trust in School Adults:		
Nearly always free	.097	.203	.330 *,#	.148	.191	.289 #
Hesitant	.010	-.019	.185	.042	-.091	.051
	Social Integration:			Integration in School Culture:		
Nearly always free	.161	.247	.307 *	.175	.193	.305 **
Hesitant	.014	-.038	.090	.046	-.076	-.054
	Political Confidence:			School Political Confidence:		
Nearly always free	-.074	-.254	-.338 *	.106	.114	.227 #
Hesitant	.071	.111	.048 **	-.011	-.178	-.092 **
	Political Interest:			School Political Interest:		
Nearly always free	.149	.181	.256 **	.212	.304	.268
Hesitant	-.073	-.240	-.190	-.024	-.046	-.046

* = Significant Linear Trend Across Three Data Points Without Predictor
** = Significant Interaction of Predictor with Linear Trend Across Three Data Points
\# = Significant Quadratic (Curvelinear) Trend Without Predictor
= Significant Interaction of Predictor with Quadratic (Curvelinear) Trend